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ABSTRACT

It is argued that the negotiation of common ground is an important but neglected area of pragmatics and language learning. Samples of first and second language learners' conversations are analyzed to demonstrate the critical role of common ground in language learning, i.e., that (1) the interactions necessary for language learning are dependent on the common ground between the participants, (2) learning to convey and exploit the common ground is a critical part of language learning, and (3) learning much of syntax, lexical choice, and prosody driven by the need to convey assumptions about the common ground. Strategies used in the explicit and implicit negotiation of common ground are identified, and suggestions are made for more systematic research on the development of such strategies in first and second language learning. Finally, the implications of these analyses for second language pedagogy are discussed, including the suggestion that strategies for negotiating common ground be taught explicitly. Contains 41 references. (MSE)

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FOREGROUNDING THE ROLE OF COMMON GROUND IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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FOREGROUNDING THE ROLE OF COMMON GROUND IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Sara W. Smith
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The present paper argues that the negotiation of common ground is an important but neglected area of pragmatics and language learning. Samples of first and second language learners' conversations are analyzed in order to demonstrate the critical role of common ground in language learning, i.e., 1) that the interactions necessary for language learning are dependent on the common ground between the participants, 2) that learning to convey and to exploit the common ground is a critical part of language learning, and 3) that learning much of syntax, lexical choice, and prosody is driven by the need to convey assumptions about the common ground. Strategies used in the explicit and implicit negotiation of common ground are identified, and suggestions are made for more systematic research on the development of such strategies in first and second language learning. Finally, the implications of such analyses for second language pedagogy are discussed, including the suggestion that strategies for negotiating common ground be taught explicitly.

INTRODUCTION

The central thesis of the present paper is that much of acquiring a first or second language consists of learning to negotiate the common ground between participants in a conversation. By negotiation, we mean that the common ground is defined interactively as interlocutors continually convey, confirm, and exploit assumptions about each other's knowledge and beliefs. This is part of a larger claim that various aspects of language exist, not only to convey information or to express social relations, but also to enable partners to create and maintain a model of each other that serves as the basis for their current and future interactions.

We believe that most theorists, as well as most speakers, take for granted the role of common ground. While Stalnaker (1974/1991) presented the following claim over 20 years ago, little formal work has followed up its many implications:

> Communication, whether linguistic or not, normally takes place against a background of beliefs or assumptions which are shared by the speaker and his audience, and which are recognized by them to be so shared.... The more common ground we can take for granted, the more efficient our communication will be. And unless we could reasonably treat **some** facts in this way, we probably could not communicate at all. (p. 472)

We want to claim that common ground is especially critical for successful communication with a language learner but, even more crucially, that negotiating common

ground is a necessary and inherent part of language learning. Further, we believe that much of what is learned is the use of various linguistic means for negotiating common ground, and that it is the need for such negotiation that drives the development of syntax, the lexicon, and prosody. Such negotiation may be explicit, as when interlocutors identify and repair a miscommunication; more often it is implicit, as speakers convey their assumptions to each other by various linguistic choices and then adapt subsequent language according to the partner's reaction. For example, the use of definite reference is a signal that the Speaker expects the Listener to be able to identify the referent. If the partner continues the topic, it is taken as a signal that the referent was adequately identified. We would argue that the interaction between partners creates the need for such signals and that language develops in order to meet these communicative goals more effectively; thus our model is both interactionist and functional.

We will not attempt to add to the data concerning language acquisition but rather will re-examine and integrate familiar data and analyses. Theorists working in several areas of first and second language acquisition have provided analyses that appear to depend on the role of common ground. We would like to strengthen the claims made separately and often implicitly by integrating them into an overall analysis in which the role of common ground is made explicit and central. And while we do not claim to present definitive tests of this interpretation in direct contrast to others, we hope the examples and arguments presented provide persuasive evidence of the role of common ground.

For several reasons, it seems easier to identify the role of common ground in first language learning (FLL) than in second language learning (SLL).[1] First, it is easier to identify the areas of common ground, as the prior experience of infants and children is both smaller and more easily identified than the prior experience of older children and adults. Second, the stages of FLL have been identified more specifically, so it is easier to identify the role of common ground as the child progresses from stage to stage. Finally, miscommunications are more transparent in interactions with children, as they are less concerned with saving face and have fewer strategies for avoiding or hiding communication problems. Thus, we will provide more analyses of FLL, though our goal is to understand stages and issues in SLL, as well as FLL.

Finally, we will argue that these analyses have important implications for SL pedagogy. The analysis supports the strategy of gradually and systematically moving from contextualized to decontextualized language, both in conversing and in writing. It also suggests that students need to learn to interpret and provide cues about common ground. We believe that it is both important and possible to teach meta-pragmatics (cf. Bouton, this volume; Cheng & Steffensen, this volume); that is, that students should and can learn to think about what assumptions we carry about each other and the role these assumptions play in our use of language. They need to understand why it is as **pragmatically** inappropriate to ask an American *Have you ever eaten a hamburger?* as it is syntactically inappropriate to ask *Has you ever eaten sashimi?* (cf. Bell, 1995).

DISCUSSION

Background

Previous writers in several fields have dealt with the concept of shared assumptions, using names that have grown out of different theoretical frameworks, such as pragmatic presuppositions (Stalnaker, 1974/1991); mutual knowledge (Gibbs, 1987; N. V. Smith, 1982) shared assumptions (Sperber & Wilson, 1986); and common ground (Clark, 1992). All seem to agree that speakers can never have any certainty about the knowledge and beliefs of their interlocutors, but that speakers do depend on their assumptions about their partner's assumptions. We use the term common ground to refer to those assumptions which are entertained by both partners in a conversation and which they assume to be mutual.

Clearly, such assumptions are easier to assess under some circumstances than others; as Clark (1992) has noted, we are most confident about such assumptions when both partners are jointly observing a common and salient event, but we often must make assumptions about another person's prior experience. Besides determining whether a partner has been exposed to information, a speaker must make assumptions about what lexical choices will make that information accessible to the listener. For example, the use of an unelaborated proper name assumes that the referent is known to the listener and is readily accessible via the name alone.

For adults who share a common culture, much common ground comes from culturally-shared activities, or scripts. A text like the following (Schank, 1984) activates a script that fills in the gaps in the description of events.

(1) John went to a restaurant. He asked the waitress for coq au vin. He paid the check and left. (p. 122)

To a large extent, a speaker works from assumptions based on judgments about membership in socio-cultural categories. Partners from a western country are assumed to share the same basic restaurant script, and partners from the midwest are assumed to share knowledge of snowy roads. If they went to dinner together last night, each assumes that they share memory for the salient events.

In addition, adults who share a native language ordinarily provide each other a variety of cues that assist in the on-line detection of common ground and facilitate the constant adaptation of their language to it. A variety of syntactic choices such as definite reference (e.g., Prince, 1981), left-dislocation (e.g., Ochs & Schieffelin, 1983), and tag questions (Houck, 1991) signal assumptions about the partner's knowledge. Discourse markers such as *you know* (Schiffrin, 1987), *actually* (Green, 1989) and *well* (Jucker, 1993) also convey assumptions and invite confirmation or disconfirmation of them. Finally, prosody (e.g., Hirschberg & Ward, 1995) may be used to negotiate such assumptions.

However, a child learning a first language has to develop a common ground of experience with others in the culture, as well as ways of retrieving that experience from others' reference to it (cf. Nelson, 1993). The child must first come to understand that others

will have different representations of the world, based on their experiences in it (Perner, 1991). Then the child must learn to use cues from others in order to create a model of each partner's knowledge and to use that model in talking to the partner. And finally the child must learn how to convey to others what he or she knows or doesn't know, while preserving both partners' face.

For an older child or an adult learning a second language, some elements are easier. He or she understands that others may have different knowledge and has some basis for judging what that different knowledge might be. People from industrialized countries probably share many scripts and much general information; but, as Gumperz (1982) and others have noted, many miscommunications between people from different cultural backgrounds occur because interlocutors have difficulty determining exactly what is and is not held in common. This is partly because they simply have less experience in common, but we believe it is also because they have less skill with linguistic devices for conveying and testing their assumptions about each other during the course of an interaction.

First Language Learning (FLL)

FLL is commonly described as being heavily dependent on the context in its early stages and then gradually becoming decontextualized. Initially, an adult cannot assume any shared and accessible context other than that which is both present and salient. Gradually, however, the child learns both to store and to retrieve knowledge out of its original context (Nelson, 1993), and the partners develop ways to judge and convey their common ground.

Reference. One of the most basic aspects of language is the ability to establish joint reference, to know when we are talking about the same thing. Acquisition of the means to establish joint reference is developed over a series of intricate stages in which a) the common ground is expanded to include past events, b) the child comes to play a more active role in identifying the common ground, and c) the child learns the use of syntactic devices for identifying and conveying assumptions about the common ground.

For example, Foster (1979, as cited in McTear, 1985) described the stages in which infants initiate reference. As early as one month, infants appeared to attempt to initiate communication, but only by directing attention to themselves and depending on the adult to interpret what was being indicated. Next, an infant would attempt to direct attention to objects present in the environment, first by gesture and then by vocalization. Scollon (1974, as cited in Reich, 1986, pp. 65-66) provides a much-cited example from a conversation between Brenda at 1;3 and her mother.

(2) Brenda: *Fan* (looking at the electric fan)
Mother: (no response)
Brenda: *Fan*
Mother: *Hm?*
Brenda: *Fan*
Mother: *Bathroom?*
Brenda: *Fan.*
Mother: *Fan! Yeah.*

Brenda: *Cool!*
Mother: *Cool, yeah. Fan makes you cool.*

Notice that Brenda insisted on getting confirmation of the common ground as a condition of her next utterance, which, taken with the original utterance, formed a "vertical sentence." The common ground appeared to play a critical role in the bootstrapping of syntactic structure.

According to Foster, only at two years or older was the child able to refer to topics not present in the environment. Even then, as McTear (1985, p. 78) illustrated, many references to absent entities are unsuccessful. Conversation (3) is between Siobhan at 2;6 and her mother:

(3) Siobhan: [*daimng*] [*daimng*][2]
Mother: *what's a [daimng]?*

(Exchange repeated several times)

Siobhan: [*pa'teps] bus in house*
Mother: *oh Stephen*
Siobhan: *[daimng]*

Note that the reference (to the steps you have to go up and to the bus in Stephen's house) was finally resolved only because the partner shared specific experiences with the child and could also judge what might be salient to her.

As McTear (1985, p. 78) pointed out, "the child lacks devices such as fully developed relative clauses to say things like *the boy who lives in a house which is up some steps and who has a toy bus in his house*." In addition, she lacks the ability to say something like *You know Stephen, the one with the toy bus? Well he...*, i.e., to build an appropriate level of description into the first mention of a referent so that the partner can readily identify him. However, it is possible to identify some strategies for negotiating common ground even in these very young children. In both conversations, when the mother indicated she didn't understand the child's reference, the child didn't abandon the message but rather repeated it several times. Such repetition may serve as a strategy to express confidence her mother would be able to identify the referent eventually.

In conversation (3), the child used elaboration by association--*up the steps* and *bus in house*--in order to make the referent more accessible. Finally, she confirmed her mother"s identification of the referent by repeating the name.

It would be easy to blame the problem in the above example on the child's limitations in phonological production. But even when that is not a problem, the child's utterances may not work because the utterance assumes knowledge the partner doesn't have.

Siobhan at 3;8 was talking to a new acquaintance, Simon, about their ages. She then abruptly referred to a child who Simon had never met,

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(4) *...but Heather's four now.*

At 4;6 she still sometimes had difficulty making the reference clear.

(5) Siobhan: *well these are going to be for Emily instead of you then?*
Heather: *who are they going to be for?*
Siobhan: *at the playschool*
Heather: *Emily?*
Siobhan: *yes*
Heather: *who's she?*
Siobhan: *the teacher at my playschool*

But, only weeks later, Siobhan was able to use an appositive structure to identify a new referent:

(6) Siobhan: *and my wee friend Andrea doesn't let me play with her toys.*

Her friend Heather at 4;10 was able to self-repair in order to provide an identification of a new referent:

(7) Heather: *guess what I was doing for Emma uh Siobhan's teacher*

Even in later years, when the child has an elaborate morpho-syntactic system available, the negotiation of reference remains a challenge. In a classic study, Flavell and associates (Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, & Jarvis, 1968) found that when second-graders carried out a task with blindfolded adult listeners, they used pointing, deictics, and other means of reference that ordinarily depend on shared visual knowledge. Contrary to early interpretations of such results, Nelson (1979/1988, p. 267) suggested, "what has been generally termed egocentrism in the young child is a misplaced assumption of shared context by either or both participants in a dialogue." As Karmiloff-Smith (1979) pointed out, children (with our encouragement!) may assume adults are omniscient. Or children may make too-generous assumptions about the availability and accessibility of knowledge they have gained, as when a child assumes that everyone knows about an event because it was on television.

Other researchers such as Menig-Petersen (1975) and Sonnenschein (1988) found that, while children as young as three years may make identifiable adjustments in referring to experiences depending on whether the adult had shared the experience, skill in appropriate reference under such circumstances continues to develop for several years. This may result both from the child's developing ability to determine what adults can and cannot be expected to know and also, as Nelson (1979 /1988) suggests, from the development of conversational strategies that allow the child to "clarify the shared context," i.e., to negotiate common ground.

Conversations and strategies for negotiating common ground. In Bruner's (1983) model of scaffolding (or formatting), the development of adult-child conversations is dependent on the creation of rituals that integrate predictable cognitive, language and social structures, as in

playing games or participating in daily routines. Consistent with Vygotsky's (1934/1986) concept of the zone of proximal development, Bruner argued that this structure makes possible a higher level of functioning than would otherwise be possible and that this serves as the basis of subsequent learning.

Nelson and Gruendel (1979/1988) pointed out that, because the child shares so many experiences and scripts with his primary caretaker,

> ...learning the structure of conversational exchanges takes place within a context in which the child's assumption of shared knowledge is justified.... We should go beyond this to suggest that it is within the support offered by contexts shared between mother and child that the child learns not only the turn-taking aspect of conversational structure but also the semantics and syntactics of conversational contingencies, such as topic sharing and contingent responding. (pp. 276-277)

They pointed out that the child may take the same assumption of shared knowledge with him into conversations with other adults or with peers. Often, this is a safe assumption, but these conversations require him to learn new strategies in order to identify those areas in which these assumptions do and do not work. While conversations with adults may depend principally on the adult's ability to interpret the child's contributions, conversations between peers require that the child develop strategies for negotiating common ground.

Nelson and Gruendel suggested that it is shared scripts that allow peers their first opportunities to move beyond discussion of the *here and now*. The following conversation is between two girls, G-1 (age 4;4) and G-2 (4;8).

(8) G-1: *And also, at nighttime, it's suppertime.*
G-2: *Yeah, at nighttime, it's suppertime. It is.*
G-1: *It's morning.*
G-2: *At morning, it's lunchtime.*
G-1: *At morning, we already had breakfast. Because at morning, it's lunchtime!*
G-2: *RIGHT!*
G-1: *Yeah, at morning, it's lunchtime.*
G-2: *At morning, it's lunchtime.*

The conversation proceeded smoothly when it built on a shared script. The girls used three basic strategies to confirm the partner's assumptions about that script: direct confirmation with an Acknowledgment Particle (*Yeah*), Repetition of the partner's utterance (*At nighttime, its suppertime*), and Continuation of Topic introduced by partner (*At morning, its lunchtime*).

However, the conversation rapidly became awkward when there were differences in the script held by the participants.

(9) G-1: *But FIRST comes snack, then comes lunch.*
G-2: *Right...Just in school, right?*

G-1: *Yeah, right, just in school.*
G-2: *Not at home.*
G-1: *Well, sometimes we have snacks at home.*
G-2: *Sometimes.*
G-1: *Sometimes I have snack at home.*
G-2: *Sometimes I have snack at my home, too.*
G-1: *Uh-hum. Because when special children come to visit us, we sometime have snack. Like, like, hotdogs, or crackers, or cookies, or, or something like that.*
G-2: *Yeah. Something. Maybe cake.* (Laughs.)
G-1: *Cake.*
G-2: *Cake. Yeah, maybe cake.*
G-1: *Or maybe, uh, maybe hotdog.*
G-2: *Maybe hotdog.*

The girls were able to detect the mismatch of scripts only gradually, as various means of checking indicated problems. First, there was an attempt to Qualify the Initial Assertion *(Just in school...)* and to check the qualification by the use of a Tag Question *(..., right?)* The Discourse Marker *well* signaled the need to reassess the assumption of the original assertion (cf. Jucker, 1993), *(Well, sometimes we have snacks at home.)* And the repeated use of Qualifiers *(Sometimes.., Maybe, uh, maybe....)* indicated that the original assertion was not part of shared knowledge. These strategies allowed the girls to negotiate the common ground to a limited extent; that is, they identified the lack of common ground, but they did not come to a formal resolution (as in, *Oh, I see you have snacks regularly at home but we only have them on special occasions, as when company comes.*).

Next, the conversation threatened to fall apart when elements appeared that were not common ground. Ordinarily, the use of a proper name, e.g., Michael, conveys the assumption that the partner can identify exactly what person is being referred to. Thus, an unintroduced reference to Jill and Michael produced confusion.

(10) G-1: *But, but, but, Jill and Michael don't like hotdog. Don't you know, but do you know Michael and Jill?*
G-2: *I know another Michael.*
G-1: *I know, I know another Michael.*
G-2: *No, I know just one Michael. I just know one Michael.*
G-1: *Do you know Flora?*
G-2: *NO! But you know what? It's a, it's one, it's it's somebody's bro...it's somebody's brother.*

It is important to note that the speaker herself showed her awareness of the potential problem; she began explicit negotiation by asking, first *Don't you know...?*, which implies that the partner **should** know, then the less presumptuous direct question *...but do you know Michael and Jill?* The girls resolved the problem only in that they established that they did not know the same Michael. However, they were never able to get a common understanding of who Michael was, and the topic ended unsatisfactorily, with a string of dysfluencies--*But*

you know what: It's a, it's one, it's it's somebody's bro...it's somebody's brother. At that point, the conversation returned with obvious relief to the safer common ground.

(11) G-1: *Are you eating your dinner?* (Laughs) *but not for real.*
G-2: *Not for real.*
G-1: *Because at morning it's lunchtime.*
G-2: *Right, at morning it is lunchtime.*
G-1: *Right, at morning it is lunchtime.*

Again, they acknowledged their common ground by the use of Repetition *(Not for real.)*, Topic Continuation *(Because at morning it's lunchtime.)*, and a Particle *(Right,...)*.

The conversation above provides evidence that, by the age of 5, children have identifiable strategies for detecting, confirming, or disconfirming assumptions about their common ground. The success of their conversation depended on their ability to exploit their common ground. They also appeared to have some ability to anticipate problematic references and some strategies for negotiating repairs.

However, children at that age apparently do not have an adult's set of strategies to prevent or more quickly resolve the confusions that arise. For example, if an adult speaker did not have good reason to believe the partner knew who Jill and Michael were, the speaker would have used some introduction such as, *I have some friends, Jill and Michael, who don't like hotdogs.*

During later childhood and adolescence, the child apparently learns more effective strategies for implicit and explicit negotiation of common ground. Unfortunately, these ages are relatively under-researched; it would seem fruitful to study the stages and means by which children develop the integrated linguistic and social skills necessary for adult communicative skills. It would also seem an excellent arena in which to study how cognition, language functions, and language structures bootstrap on each together.

Second Language Learning (SLL)

We believe that common ground also plays a critical but neglected role in SLL, that is, not only is common ground necessary for early communication but it is also critical to language learning itself. However, there are some important differences that should be noted concerning SLL by adults or older children. First, they already have a "theory of mind" (Perner, 1991), which includes the awareness that others may have different knowledge. Second, they have learned many pan-cultural schemas and scripts. And third, they have some beliefs about what members of the target culture should know.

Reference. For various reasons, researchers have not focused as much on the very earliest stages of second language learning. The development of first references would appear to be less complex, as the SL learner already has the cognitive and social skills necessary to establish joint reference. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that the success of one's first spontaneous uses of reference are heavily dependent on the existence of a shared context, such as the presence of bread in a bakery or the use of a ticket-buying script at a

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ticket counter. When such context is lacking, the SL learner may be dependent on the native-speaker's ability to find an appropriate context for interpreting an inadequate production, as in the following example (Nelson, 1989 as cited in Tarone & Yule, 1989, p. 110):

(12) Learner: *I'm looking for [testel].*
E.N.: *Erica Tesdell? Her office is 110.*
Learner: *[testel]*
E.N.: *A woman teacher?*
Learner: *No, man. [testel]*
E.N.: *What does he look like?*
etc.

It turned out the learner was looking for a person named Ted Taylor. Unless the native speaker had known that person and known that he was someone ESL students might be looking for, she almost certainly would not have been able to interpret the utterance.

The SL learner with more linguistic skills and strategic competence is often able to supply a verbal context that establishes the common ground necessary for a listener to interpret a flawed reference production (Pica, 1987, as cited in Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 221):

(13) NNS: And *they have the chwach there*
NS: *The what?*
NNS: The *chwach--I know someone that--*
NS: *What does it mean?*
NNS: *Like um American people they always go there every Sunday.*
NS: *Yes?*
NNS: *You know--every morning that there pr-that-the American people get dressed up to go to um chwach.*
NS: *Oh to church--I see.*

Sentences. The successful production of early sentences also appears to depend on the partners' ability to exploit the common ground. Ellis (1985, as cited in Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 216) presented what was believed to be a young NNS's first production of a two-constituent utterance in English:

(14) NS: *I want you to tell me what you can see in the picture or what's wrong with the picture.*
NNS: *A /paik/* (= bike)
NS: *A cycle, yes, but what's wrong.*
NNS: */ret/* (= red).
NS: *It's red, yes. What's wrong with it?*
NNS: *Black.*
NS: *Black. Good. Black what?*
NNS: *Black /taes/* (= tires).

Gass and Selinker used (14) to illustrate their point that in SLL, as in FLL, conversational interaction drives syntactic development, rather than vice versa. We would add further that the common ground appears to be a necessary part of the interaction, both to provide the basis for the production and to enable the partner to comprehend the incomplete sentence.

In Wong Fillmore's (1979) study of young SL learners, their first sentences consisted of formulaic utterances that were first used contextually. For example, a child might use *How do you do dese*? to open a conversation in a variety of contexts and without knowing the meaning of the lexical items. As learners produced variations on these formulas, these variations were also used contextually and could generally be understood only by a person sharing the context, as when asking, *How do you do dese flower power?* to a child drawing flowers. Wong Fillmore argued that for SL learners, the syntax grew out of the interaction, and she argued further (p. 211) that the social use of formulaic expressions

> ...was extremely important because it permitted the learners to continue participating in activities which provided contexts for the learning of new material. This new material was learnable and memorable by virtue of being embedded in current, interest-building activities....

She observed that both the learner and the NS limited their conversation to the present context and argued that this allowed them to understand each other well enough to continue interacting. Thus it appears that the common ground provided by the context plays a critical role in the development of the second language.

However, Saville-Troike (1988, p. 266) observed that the "message-oriented" strategies that many children used to learn the SL in the preschool setting were not necessarily adequate in grade school classrooms. She argued that, as "academic language competence" involves context-reduced communication, the child must learn different strategies. More research is needed to determine how the child develops the ability to identify and exploit common ground that is more abstract in nature, both in and out of the classroom setting.

Conversations and Narratives. In SLL, as in FLL, early conversations are highly dependent on the shared context of the partners. With that apparently in mind, researchers in the European project on Second Language Acquisition by Adult Immigrants devised a task to study SL development of narratives. The NNS informant and a Target Language Researcher (TLR) watched the first half of a Charlie Chaplin video together. Midway through, the TLR left and later asked the NNS what happened after he or she left, participating only as much as was necessary to maintain the conversation. In the conversation below, Paula, a native speaker of Spanish, had been in France for about 6 months when she first participated in the task. She was described as having a French vocabulary of less than 50 words. The first part of her narrative is presented below as translated into English (Klein & Perdue, 1992, p. 260).[3]

(15) NNS: *unemployment + without work*
TLR: *without work yes yes and so who is without work?*
NNS: **el padre* father*
TLR: *the father?*

NNS: *the father of the children*
TLR: *there is a girl?*
NNS: *three*
TLR: *three or three small ones?*
NNS: *two small ones and a + woman? ...a girl*
TLR: *the girl she has what age?*
NNS: *fifteen*
TLR: *and she works?*
NNS: *no*
TLR: *what does she do?*
NS: *she is hungry*
TLR: *what does she do to eat?*
NNS: *[steal] *para* eat*
(Continued for 31 exchanges)

Paula lacked the skills to tell the story by herself; 22 of her 31 utterances were produced with "immediate reliance" on the TLR. Klein and Perdue describe TLR as providing scaffolding that played two roles, to prompt her and to help her learn appropriate lexical items and structures. Thus, even though the speaker lacked the skills for describing characters and actions and for tying episodes together, the prompts provided a structure that enabled her to create a narrative from sentence fragments. Second, Paula used words and phrases in her subsequent utterances that were first introduced by the TLR after she failed to use them when they would have been expected. Thus, while she originally used the broader term *children*, she eventually used *girl* after the TLR did. Other words similarly enabled by the TLR in the section above are *she*, *small*, and *eat*. We believe it is important to note that an interlocutor not already familiar with the video would not have been able to maintain the interview or create the context for learning appropriate forms, as he would not have been able either to supply the appropriate prompts or to understand her answers.

Development of strategies for conveying and exploiting common ground. According to our analysis (Jucker & Smith, 1995), speakers ordinarily convey and confirm assumptions about common ground through a variety of implicit and explicit strategies. Thus one important task for the SL learner is to learn those devices for doing so. In English, the article system serves to convey assumptions about whether a referent is already accessible to the interlocutor (through prior mention in the linguistic context or through shared knowledge) or is being introduced for the first time. For example, the phrase *the dog* instructs the listener to search for a known dog, while *a dog* tells the listener to establish a new canine referent. The article system is very intricate, and it is typically one of the last syntactic areas mastered by SL learners, especially those whose FL has no article system. When one first hears such speakers, it appears that they simply omit articles. Thus it seems surprising at first to find that SL learners develop systematic use of articles early in their mastery of English.

Klein and Perdue found that SL learners of English devised various ways to distinguish between common ground and new information. For example, Madan, a native speaker of Punjabi, used the zero article for many referents. While at first it might appear that he simply failed to use articles most of the time, closer examination revealed that his use of articles was quite systematic. While no article was used with characters that were in the first

part of the video and were presumed to be common ground, *one X* was systematically used to introduce characters and objects that appeared in the video after TLR left (Klein & Perdue, 1992, p. 70).

(16) *girl stealing one shop*
one woman coming back

In later interviews, he continued to use *one X* for indefinite reference, but he also began to use *the X* to introduce new NP's as objects, e.g. (p. 76),

(17) *back door stand the policeman*

and then to use *that X* to reintroduce characters already known to the audience, e.g. (p. 79),

(18) *that girl she's accident with charlie*

Another informant, a native speaker of Italian, used *the* to introduce objects , e.g. (p. 98),

(19) *the boat go into the sea*

throughout the narrative, but rather than use *the/a* alternation the way a NS would, he created other devices to discriminate between familiar and unfamiliar characters. In an early interview, he used *that woman* to refer to the main character and *another woman* each time he referred to a second woman who appeared. Other new characters or important objects were introduced with *one*, e.g. (p. 98),

(20) *and he see this girl/her with one piece of bread burgled but one policeman*
see her with this piece of bread

Finally, *this* or *that* were used to refer to previously mentioned characters or important objects.

Similarly, Tarone (1985, as cited and discussed in Tarone & Yule, 1989) found that more advanced NNS's were quite accurate in their use of definite vs. indefinite articles in narrative tasks (83% and 91% correct for Japanese and Arabic speakers, respectively), even though they were not very accurate (56% and 38%) in paper-and-pencil tasks. In contrast, speakers were less accurate in the use of present tense first person singular *s* in the narrative task compared to the written one. Tarone and Yule (p. 84) argued that:

> In successfully narrating a story...the speaker must make sure that references to the various protagonists and objects which are crucial to the story line are clear; articles and pronouns are very important in maintaining this sort of clear reference.

One could continue the line of argument and suggest that it is the felt need to distinguish new from commonly held knowledge that drives the speaker's development of the forms that signal this distinction.

In sum, speakers seem sensitive to the needs of the audience to distinguish new material from common ground. Thus, they appear to develop means to make such a distinction relatively early in their mastery of the language, and they are inventive in their use of a new language to do so.

Explicit negotiation of common ground. Second language learners also must find ways to explicitly negotiate meanings. This seems to show up especially in NNS-NNS interactions. Whereas the teacher or an adult NS may play the role of the near-omniscient partner responsible for doing the work of the interaction, learners talking with each other must learn strategies for identifying and exploiting the common ground.

They learn to ask directly about their partner's knowledge, even before they have mastered the nuances of the question structures (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 210).

(21) NNS: *I was born in Nagasaki. Do you know Nagasaki?*

They also learn to formulate and repair utterances in terms that are most likely to be common ground. In the examples below (Bialystok, 1990), 9-year olds learning French participated in an exercise in which partners were required to identify objects from an array of pictures in order to reorganize them. The Director was responsible for describing the picture so the matcher could select the correct one; all pictures were of items for which the classes had not learned the names, such as *spatula* and *hammer*. The English translation is given (Bialystok, 1990, p. 68).

(22) Director: *You use it for cooking.*
Matcher: *What do you cook with it?*
Director: *You can make pancakes and often scrambled eggs.*
Matcher: *Do you pick them up with this?*
Director: *Yes.*

In the example above, the director and matcher collaborated to identify a spatula by building on assumed common ground both in their knowledge of the world (cooking) and in their lexical knowledge (names for cooking, pancakes, etc.).

When a participant misjudges the common ground, partners are often able to find even more basic common ground in order to repair the reference (Bialystok, 1990, p. 69):

(23) Director: *When you have a nail and you want to put the nail in the wood.*
Matcher: *I don't know what a nail is.*
Director: *When you want to put two pieces of wood together you need a nail. It is a little metal thing. When you want to put it in the wood, you need something to put it in the wood.*

The repair (to identify first *nail* and then *hammer*) worked only because the Matcher already had the concepts involved, both the lexical concepts such as wood and metal, and world knowledge concerning ways in which wood is held together.

Problems in negotiating common ground. SL learners are certainly not always successful, either with other NSS's or with NS's. Hatch (1983, citing Butterworth, 1978) presented a conversation in which a NS and NNS who apparently shared some knowledge of soccer exchanged eight turns in an unsuccessful attempt to get the NNS to understand the question *Who is the best player in Colombia?* Although the NS appealed to presumed common ground, *Do, do they have someone like Pele in Columbia?*, he finally gave up and abruptly changed the topic. Varonis and Gass (1985, p. 332) described an interaction between a NNS and a NS who exchanged 25 turns during which the NNS attempted to get information about the purchase of a television set while the NS, answering the telephone for a repair shop, assumed the NNS owned a set he wanted repaired or sold.

(24) NNS: *Could you tell me about price and size of Sylvania TV color?*
NS: *What did you want? A service call?*
NNS: *Uh, 17 inch, huh?*
NS: *What did you want? A service call, or how much to repair a TV?*
NNS: *Yeah TV color.*
NS: *17 inch.*
NNS: *OK.*

While the NNS had adequate skills to purchase a set, had the two speakers been following the same script, he did not have the skills needed to determine that they had begun from completely different presuppositions about the function of the shop.

In fact, the negotiation of common ground may remain problematic long after speakers have near-native skills in syntax and lexical choices. A number of writers have indicated that miscommunications may result from mistaken assumptions regarding common ground when adult learners cross language and cultural boundaries (e.g., Gunthner, 1993; House, 1993; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Tarone & Yule, 1989). While most SL teaching assumes that limited syntax and vocabulary is the main source of problems, these examples provide evidence that the negotiation of common ground remains a major challenge to SL learners after they have mastered much standard syntax and vocabulary.

In a series of essays, Gumperz (1982) discussed the need for interlocutors to determine the contextual presuppositions of an interaction, arguing that "interpretations are jointly negotiated by speaker and hearer and judgments either confirmed or changed by the reactions they evoke" (p. 5). He then described the ways in which people signal and probe for cues that will enable them to provide a sociocultural context for utterances, illustrating his points with various examples of miscommunications that resulted from seemingly small mismatches in wording and intonation. In Gumperz's examples, the interlocutors were usually southern Asians who were fluent in terms of English syntax and vocabulary but who used different culturally-based interpretative frames.

Working from Gumperz's framework, Gunthner (1993, p. 292) argued that contextualization also includes "the design of the utterance with an orientation to the background knowledge and cognitive state of the recipients." She further suggested that, for interlocutors from different "life-worlds," it is difficult for them "to assess what kind of social knowledge can be presupposed and what needs further explanation."

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She analyzed conversations between native speakers of German and their advanced students or colleagues in China. Thus, in both cases below, the SLL was fluent in the target language by all standard measures. Conversation (25) was held in German between S., a German lecturer in China, and Bao, a Chinese teacher of German (the English translation is given).

(25) Bao: *we Chinese think, a a yeah a woman in power is not good. you see, like for example, ZIQI.*
S: *ya? who is zi: eh ZIqi? who is that?*
Bao: *don't you know ZIQI?*
S: *no. Ziqi? no.*
Bao: *she was the king's widow during the ja QING dynasty.*
S: *when did she live?*

The NNS used an unelaborated proper name, which presumed, incorrectly, that the listener would be able to identify the referent by name.

Conversation (26) was held between Qin, who is Chinese and fluent in German, and M., a German who had been in China for 9 months.

(26) Qin: *also the reform of the university.*
M: *mhm*
Qin: *I believe before the cultural revolution:yeah you surely know ++ the cultural revolution:*
M: *haha/ha a very ((HI))common((HI))topic((HI))*
Qin: */hi hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha*
M&Q: *hahaahahahahahahhahahahah*
M: *when you*
Qin: *yeah before; the cultural revolution yeah, then the graduates from middle school were sent yeah directly to university.*

While one would expect that communication would be disrupted when the speaker overestimated the partner's knowledge as in (25), it is less obvious why it is also disrupted when Qin underestimated the partner's knowledge, in (26). Yet, as Gunthner noted, concerning (26), "Underestimating the knowledge of the recipient and consequently employing 'talking-down' techniques might turn out to be more face-threatening than overestimating their knowledge" (p. 293).

Thus, the negotiation of common ground is a delicate matter; if a speaker overestimates her partner's knowledge, he cannot understand what she is saying; but if she underestimates it, both partners may lose face. As important as these critical pragmatic skills are for both referential and social aspects of communication, they are ignored in models of second language learning and in formal language instruction.

In Gunthner's analysis, the problem consisted of the SL learner's under- or over-estimation of the common ground. We would argue that the problem goes deeper. Even when native speakers are not certain of common ground, they are generally able to prevent

the type breakdown that occurred in (25) and (26). Thus a major component of the problem for SL learners is that they also have very limited means for negotiating the common ground. For whereas Bao introduced Ziqi with a proper noun, a native speaker who was not certain the partner knew of a historical character might introduce her with elaborative phrases such as *the notorious empress of the Qing dynasty*, and/or an immediate comprehension check, *Do you know of Ziqi?* Further, in attempting to repair the miscommunication, instead of the neutral question form, Bao asked, *Don't you know Ziqi?* This seemingly small difference in the form of the question changed it into an apparent challenge, which probably made matters worse.

In (26), the speaker may have suspected the partner knew of the cultural revolution but did not know how to indirectly test that assumption. For a native speaker, there are a variety of ways to remind the listener without threatening face, including the use of expanded noun phrases *the cultural revolution during the 60's when...*, the use of discourse markers *during the cultural revolution, you know?*, and/or the use of intonation *during the cultural revolution?*.

In sum, a conversation with an SL learner may be awkward, not just because the learner has greater difficulty with his original assumptions about the common ground, but also because he has fewer devices for continually conveying and confirming them. As these skills are rarely taught explicitly, learners are left to figure them out on their own, which may involve a long period of trial and error.

Implications for pedagogy

Looking at SLL in terms of the role of common ground has direct implications for SL pedagogy. First, it provides affirmation for the current view that the culture needs to be taught along with the language. If structural choices depend on the common ground between interlocutors, teaching structure and teaching culture are integrally interrelated.

Second, SL instructors can identify and use commonly held scripts and knowledge as scaffolding for the SL learner. Most beginning lessons do so (including both textbook examples such as *I write with a pencil* and communicative exercises such as greetings). Similarly, sheltered English classrooms usually begin with material that can be demonstrated visually and which involves familiar concepts. The teacher's awareness of areas of common ground that students bring with them can help in planning crucial beginning lessons, and the teacher can deliberately develop classroom scripts and content areas that provide scaffolding for further development. Finally, encouragement of immediate student responses can help the teacher adjust classroom language to the students' actual level of knowledge.

However, more attention needs to be paid to the systematic decontextualization of language, both for comprehension and production and for oral and written language. While good teachers do much of this already, they would benefit from doing so in a more systematic way. For example, writing assignments could systematically progress from topics and target audiences for which SL writers can safely assume much common ground to those in which little common ground can be presumed. Students can be taught to analyze their audience's presumed knowledge before planning the content of a message.

In addition, we believe students should learn means for explicit negotiation of common ground, and that this should occur in appropriate stages. In the beginning stages, they can learn how to ask the interlocutor whether they know something before proceeding to talk about it (*Do you know Ziqi?*). In later stages, they can learn how to build confirmation checks into the text through intonation and structural choices (*There was a notorious empress, Ziqi?...who...*).

Finally, we propose that students should be explicitly taught the relation between structural choices and the assumptions we make about each other. Such metapragmatic learning would enhance the student's understanding of their new language and also give them a better understanding of language in general. While much past discussion of SLL has implied that conscious learning has little impact on performance, Schmidt (1993) argued convincingly that direct teaching of metapragmatics can facilitate language learning, and recent research provides clear evidence that both in SL comprehension (Bouton, this volume) and in writing (Cheng & Steffensen, this volume), such teaching can have a strong impact.

CONCLUSION

In our analysis, the common ground between the infant and a familiar person serves as the basis for the child's first communications. As a child attempts to communicate in broader contexts and to a broader audience, he or she must learn those aspects of language that allow him or her to identify and exploit the common ground that exists between partners.

We believe it is important to analyze more systematically the means by which children and adults negotiate common ground and the processes involved in the acquisition of this critical component of communication.

We believe that common ground plays an equally important role in SLL and that further research would demonstrate the stages and processes whereby critical pragmatic skills are learned.

Finally, we believe this analysis has several implications for second language pedagogy. For example, it is consistent with the advice that second language teachers attempt to move students from contextualized to decontextualized language. It also suggests that SL learners would benefit from learning to identify and produce on-line cues that signal assumptions about knowledge and beliefs held in common.

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NOTES

[1] We are not intending to distinguish between language learning and language acquisition for the purposes of the present paper.

[2] [...] encloses a phonological approximation of the utterance.

[3] The following transcription notations are used:

+ = pause
... = material uttered in first language
[...] = lexical item for which speaker required assistance

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